

23D INFANTRY DIVISION (AMERICAN)
APO San Francisco 96374

AVDF-SE-AG

24 July 1970

SUBJECT: Operational Report-Lessons Learned

1. Section 1, Operations: Significant Operations.

The temporary opening of LZ Boxer by the 1st of 46th Infantry was basically planned for a search and destroy mission. A Company 26 Engr supported the opening by supplying a squad minesweep team for the initial opening 24 Apr 70 and a squad size tactical wire emplacement, and demolitions teams which remained on the hill from 25 Apr to 12 May 70. Triple concertina was laid around the entire hill and the TCC while demolitions were used in felling trees and clearing fields of fire.

A Company 26th Engr's working with E company successfully spanned a blown QL-1 bridge section at BT225347 with a 90' double single Bailey bridge on 8 May 70. The class 60, 108 ft. steel girder bridge had been blown during the night of the 7th. A Company was alerted and reconnoitered the site 0745 hrs. Five platoons were alerted and began work at 0815 hrs. Traffic resumed flow at 1530 hrs. One traffic control squad remained on the bridge until a suitable raft bypass was constructed and the bailey bridge removed 3 days later.

From the 18th Apr 70 thru 12 May 70 2nd pl. A Co, 26th Engr's, supported the 1st of the 1st Armored Cavalry in their mission to search out, and destroy any enemy in the Hoai Duc area. Armored Cavalry units had not been in the valley for approximately two years. No mines were found or detonated, however, there were numerous occasions when mortar, RPG and small arms fire were encountered; Often, the mine of partially filled rice paddies necessitated the use of the sweep team to clear a path on the hard laterite surfaced 531 for a speedy exit or entrance in the valley.

The period 4 Jun thru 20 Jun 70 found the first platoon, A Company, upgrading highway 531 east of Tan Ky. Due to the very dry weather some problems were encountered keeping the road damp enough to work and effectively using all equipment when a key unit such as a bucket loader or dozer was inoperable. No immediate solution was at hand, since no further equipment was available.

A Company supplied two sweep teams working with B Company to open the Tan Ky Phuc road on two occasions 7 June thru 8 June and 15 June thru 17 June. One 40 lb. pressure mine was found and destroyed by the third pl. A Company. No further incidents occurred within A Company's area of responsibility, however, valuable lessons were learned in the conducting of large scale roadsweeps.

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L2 Flessentville was also being opened during 9 June thru 14 June 1970 as a six gun artillery fire support base. A squad size sweep team was first used followed by third platoon's continuous employment of a demolitions clearing squad element. The clearing team also directed the building of the artillery gun positions and two helopads by a D5 dozer that was airlifted in. Total explosives used were 10,868 lbs.

The reopening of L3 Mary Ann, 26 June 1970 thru 3 July 1970, as a major artillery fire base and 1/46 Infantry Headquarters involved extensive clearing of large diameter trees, and heavy underbrush in addition to a minesweep, gun-pit, helopad, and road construction. A D5 dozer was airlifted in by sections, assembled and put to work clearing, digging gunpits, constructing helopads and a road. Approximately 96,000 lbs of explosives were used in the February, June and July operation. A Company's Engineer working teams alternated between two and three platoons at all times. Resupply was continually made by OH-47 hook helicopter, with an average day bringing 210,000 lbs of men and materials to the growing base. From 3 July 1970 to the present 24 July 1970, a squad continues to work on minor clearing. Construction of a tactical operations center for the 1/46 Infantry and four additional bunkers are also planned to start on 26 July 1970.

The Khe Sanh airstrip reopening starting on 12 July 1970 continues to be a major long distance search and destroy mission given to the 2/1 Infantry Battalion and the 6th Arvin Regiment. A Company's Engineer support missions were twofold in opening the bombed and debris covered 5600 ft. runway to C-130 aircraft traffic and providing demolitions and light construction capabilities to each of the 2/1 Infantry Companies. Six squads worked 14 hours a day on runway repairs for six days while an engineer squad was assigned to each of three Infantry Companies. Airmobile equipment for hauling fill, leveling, compacting and penprime distribution was hooked in and was operated upon landing by personnel from the Mobile Construction Battalion 62. C-123 Aircraft were able to land on the fourth day of the operation and the runway had C-130 capabilities on the morning of the fifth day. Squad support to the Infantry Companies will continue until 29 July 1970.

2. Section 2, Lessons Learned

A. Operations

1. SUBJECT: HILLTOP L3 clearing procedures

a. Observations: When a hilltop L3 must be cleared quickly and safely of large diameter trees and thick underbrush, correct procedure is especially important.

b. Evaluation: L3 clearing is a hot, tiresome job at best, however a few general guidelines can make for faster work, less confusion and more safety when dealing with people, machines and explosives.

c. Recommendations: When resupply and movement to an L3 must be

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entirely by air it is wise to plan exactly what loads go in what order and how much can be carried in each load. Personal gear, weapons and a light load of ammunition with minimum tools should be carried by the individual, allowing quick defensive movement upon landing, if necessary. All other loads must be ordered as they are to be used so as to eliminate excess equipment hindering initial operations.

A sweep team is normally employed first. They carry only personal gear and sweep equipment and are the only personnel moving within the LZ during sweep operations. No equipment is hooked in until the sweep is completed.

If the LZ is small with very dense underbrush it would be wise to use a first hook load of Bangalore torpedoes to complete clearing before allowing outer security elements to approach the LZ. If large trees must be cleared, they too must be filled with demolitions before allowing LZ occupation. When large diameter trees of three feet or greater are encountered they should be blown into 10 foot or smaller sections to allow easy removal, by dozer down the hillside. And where possible demolitions should be set so as to fall trees off the hill with the first detonation. If there is doubt as to whether a tree will fall in the desired direction, a small kicker charge, not large enough for complete cutting, may be placed approx 7 ft up on the side of the tree opposite the desired direction of fall. If only small trees 7 inch in diameter or less must be cleared, gasoline chainsaws work well. Brush and saplings with less than a 2 1/2 inch diameter are easily cleared with sharp machetes.

It is unwise to use large cratering charges in creating over three man foxholes as incoming mortars become a much more serious problem to individual safety.

Small bulldozers such as the Case 450 or the D5 can be very useful for moving felled trees, clearing fields of fire, digging gun pits, building positions storage trenches, making helicopter pads and roads. However, if a dozer must be hooked in dissected into sections, such as the engine separated from the tracks and blade, it is important that a level hard area is found for reassembly. Otherwise, the additional complications of being stuck or track misalignment may occur. Usually, when reassembly of sections is necessary, a day must be allowed for assembly operations.

Basic raw materials such as small trees along with massed large culvert halves and engineer pickets make excellent overhead cover when covered with sandbags. Large half culvert may also be employed in trenches dug by a small dozer and then backfilled over the half tunnel sections.

As soon as dozer and explosive clearing has progressed beyond what is to be the tactical wire fighting line squad teams may bring forward and string first one complete encircling roll of concertina, which upon completion is followed by a second inner roll and a top roll completing a triple concertina barrier.

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Time is important. Maximum effort should be expended on the first day. Enough time should be allowed during the day to construct up to three man, rough dug in fighting and sleeping positions to be made. This will require one to two hours depending on the nature of the earth and the state of exhaustion of the individual.

If an LL is fairly large or naturally sectioned into protective working areas it may be divided into not more than two working areas. When demolitions use is completed in one area some occupation, clearing and construction may be carried out there while charges are being set in another section. However, strict rules of safety must be obeyed at all times and care taken that all personnel are adequately warned and take cover before any charges are fired.

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